

Legislative Update



Dear Friends:

Since returning from the Memorial Day recess, the U.S. Senate has tackled a number of important issues and engaged in challenging national debates. I remain committed to developing innovative solutions to our nation's unique challenges, and delivering results for Illinois. During the past two weeks, I introduced several bills that would improve our schools, expand access to health care for minority populations and wounded soldiers, protect our right to vote, and secure our homeland.

Here is a look at what I've worked on over the past few weeks for all of you back home.

Sincerely,

Barack Obama

In an effort to provide information to you and our constituents regarding current issues and legislation in Congress, we are forwarding July's legislative update to you from Senator Obama.

Our office felt that this update may be informative to you, your organization, as well as others you may know. We urge you to feel free to forward this information on to others.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our D.C. office at (202) 224-2854 or any of our offices in Illinois.

Recent News — National Debates

immigration

As most of you have read on the covers of your local newspapers and have seen on the evening news, comprehensive immigration reform has dominated our legislative schedule. I firmly believe that we need to strengthen border security, enact workforce enforcement, and offer the nearly 12 million undocumented workers a path to citizenship. Immigration reform must be realistic, tough, and respect the values on which our country was founded. Even though the Senate failed to pass an immigration bill for the second time in two years, I am committed to finding a long-term solution to this serious problem.

energy

Recently, the Senate passed a comprehensive energy bill to reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil and fight against global climate change. Included in the bill were provisions to raise fuel economy standards for cars and trucks, increase the use of renewable fuels such as ethanol, and promote greater energy efficiency. Although the bill was not as bold as I would have wanted, I voted for the bill and was pleased that it passed.

Stay up to Date with Barack's work in the Senate and on issues of importance to Illinois at <http://www.obama.senate.gov/>

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Improving our Schools

America's teachers face enormous responsibilities and challenges in today's schools. Before new teachers enter our classrooms, we must provide them with the skills and support they need to serve children in high-needs school districts. Last month, I joined with Congressman Rahm Emanuel to introduce the *Teacher Residency Program (S. 1574)*, which would partner prospective teachers with mentor teachers for an academic year. Similar to medical residency programs for training health care professionals, this arrangement would allow teachers to receive master's level coursework and certification, and gain hands-on classroom experience. Teaching Residency Programs would not only strengthen our teachers and schools, but would bolster our nation's competitiveness by providing the best possible education to our next generation of leaders.

During the last Congress, I introduced legislation to require all child care facilities, including day care centers and pre-school facilities, to be certified lead-safe in five years. Lead poisoning continues to pose an enormous threat to our children's health and safety in day care facilities and schools in Illinois and across America. I was pleased to see that the Environmental Protection Agency took an important step forward by accepting my proposal that those who renovate and repair our schools follow safe lead practices. Requiring mandatory lead-safety training and certification of our schools' contractors is a basic precaution we can take to keep our children healthy and our schools lead-free. I hope the EPA now adopts my *Lead Poisoning Reduction Act* as a whole by requiring all child care facilities to be certified lead-safe within five years.

For too long, tricks and intimidation have kept thousands of Americans from voting and skewed the results of elections. For that reason, I'm proud that the House of Representatives passed my legislation, the *Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Prevention Act of 2007 (S. 453)*, to make voter intimidation and deception punishable by law. This bill also contains strong penalties so that people who commit these crimes suffer more than just a slap on the wrist. Voting is one of our most solemn obligations, and we must ensure that all Americans have equal, unfettered access to the polls. The Senate must now act quickly to pass this bill in order to outlaw voter intimidation and deceptive election practices.

As a senator, one of my constitutional responsibilities is ensuring that the individuals the President nominates to top positions will serve your interests. I recently sent a letter to Rules Committee Chairwoman Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Ranking Member Robert Bennett (R-UT), raising concerns about the nomination of Hans von Spakovsky to the Federal Election Commission. In the letter, I said that nominees to the Commission should demonstrate a consistent ability to uphold the law and overcome partisan biases. Unfortunately, Mr. von Spakovsky's tenure at the Justice Department and as a Georgia election official does not reflect a record of nonpartisanship, fairness, and judgment necessary to enforce election laws.

Protecting our Right to Vote

Strengthening America's Families

It is a moral imperative to ensure that Americans have access to quality health care regardless of economic, social, or ethnic backgrounds. In June, I was one of the lead sponsors of the *Minority Health Improvement and Health Disparity Elimination Act (S. 1576)*. This comprehensive legislation provides the resources to increase access to care, improve health care quality, diversify the health care workforce, and expand research into minority health issues.

I recently joined with Senator Evan Bayh (D-IN) to introduce the *Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2007 (S. 1626)*. This legislation would assist fathers who make child-support payments by providing them with employment opportunities and training, and expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit. It would also put an end to the penalization of marriage in the tax code and would crack down on those who avoid their responsibility by increasing child-support enforcement. The end result of this bill would be to ensure that children and families, not the government, receive every penny of child support.

Making Our Neighborhoods Safe

At a time when the bloodshed on our streets is on the rise, making sure the criminal justice system in Illinois is fully equipped to keep our schools and communities safe is a top priority. I secured funding to help strengthen Illinois' justice and law enforcement system and support programs

for at-risk youth. This funding will provide our law enforcement officers with the communications and data systems they need to do their jobs and promote mentoring and after-school opportunities for at-risk youth.

Saving our Environment

One of the greatest challenges faced by our generation is the problem of global climate change. During the recent debate on the energy bill, I introduced an amendment to create a national low carbon fuel standard that would require a 10 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, the equivalent of taking 30 million cars off the road. Although my proposal was not included in the final bill passed by the Senate, I intend to offer it again when the Senate

takes up comprehensive climate change legislation later this year.

Developing environmentally-friendly fuel alternatives for vehicles is a critical step we can take to reduce America's consumption of foreign oil and combat global climate change. I joined with Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Maria Cantwell (D-WA) to introduce legislation to help develop

commercially viable plug-in hybrid vehicles and other electric vehicles. The technology to produce energy alternatives exists, and we must provide the appropriate incentives to encourage consumer and manufacturer use. Supporting energy efficient technology and electric vehicles would also help the American auto industry regain its competitive edge.

Standing Up Against Genocide

Like everyone else horrified by the genocide in Darfur and ashamed of the international community's failure to respond more effectively, I anxiously await concrete evidence that the Government of Sudan is interested in halting its atrocities, reengaging in a political peace process, and allowing the deployment of a strong and effective peacekeeping force. Recently, I joined Senator Dick Durbin in sponsoring the *Sudan Disclosure and Enforcement Act (S. 1563)*, which would require U.S.-listed companies that operate in the Sudanese oil industry to file more detailed disclosures with the Securities and Exchange Commission, increase the civil and criminal penalties for violating American sanctions, and authorize greater resources to track Sudanese economic activity and pursue those who violate sanctions.

Securing the Homeland

I was pleased that the Appropriations Committee approved my request for \$3.35 million in federal funding to renovate and expand Rock Island Arsenal's combined Fire and Police Station, which was originally constructed in 1874. Making sure our first responders have the facilities, resources, and equipment they need to do their jobs and keep us safe is a critical priority for the Quad Cities region. This important funding will modernize and expand the Rock Island Arsenal facility to allow police and fire personnel to effectively and rapidly respond to emergencies.

I also applaud the Appropriations Committee's decision to provide funding to implement the Lugar-Obama initiative – a major step forward in addressing critical security challenges faced by the United States and our allies. This initiative enhances U.S. efforts to destroy conventional weapons stockpiles and to detect and interdict weapons and materials of mass destruction throughout the world. The Committee will provide \$48 million to prevent conventional weapons from being used against our service members in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan and from falling into the hands of terrorists and fueling civil wars around the world.

Caring for our Wounded Soldiers

Providing the best care for our service members, veterans and their families is one thing about this war we can still get right. In February, I introduced legislation that would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to publish report cards about the quality of care in VA hospitals. I am pleased that this provision will be included in next year's Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill.

The Senate Armed Services Committee has adopted proposals that I've introduced with Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO) from our *Dignity for Wounded Warriors Act (S. 713)*. The committee-passed bill goes a long way toward providing our service members with the treatment and facilities they and their families need to heal and rebuild their lives. This legislation can be further strengthened by adopting other reforms I proposed, including: strengthening protections for service members against improper discharges for mental health conditions, adding important new job protections for family members, and requiring mental health screenings for troops when they come home.

The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee accepted several of my proposals in a comprehensive health and benefits bill for our service members. These proposals include: extending mental health care coverage for veterans, requiring timely mental health evaluations upon the veteran's request, improving the VA's support and outreach to members of the National Guard and Reserve and their families, and strengthening oversight of the VA's provision of services and benefits to veterans. Several of these provisions are drawn from the *Lane Evans Veterans' Health and Benefits Improvement Act (S. 117)*, which I introduced earlier this year.

If you have questions or ideas, please feel free to contact me through any of my offices in Illinois or Washington, D.C.

Washington D.C. Office

713 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
(202) 224-2854
(202) 228-4260 fax
(202) 228-1404 TDD

Springfield Office

607 East Adams Street
Springfield, Illinois 62701
(217) 492-5089
(217) 492-5099 fax

Chicago Office

John C. Kluczynski Federal Building
230 South Dearborn Street
Suite 3900 (39th floor)
Chicago, Illinois 60604
(312) 886-3506
(312) 886-3514 fax
Toll free: (866) 445-2520
(for IL residents only)

Marion Office

701 North Court Street
Marion, Illinois 62959
(618) 997-2402
(618) 997-2850 fax

Moline Office

1911 52nd Avenue
Moline, Illinois 61265
(309) 736-1217
(309) 736-1233 fax

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